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ABSTRACT

Education in, for, and about the outdoors is an effective way to develop students' knowledge and appreciation of their environment, to stimulate their curiosity, and to motivate them to learn. Steps involved in establishing an outdoor education program for public schools include: (1) gaining support of school teachers and administrators, parents, and community members; (2) drafting a definite plan with specific recommendations on site locations, topics of study, schedules for the school year, and estimated costs; and (3) securing funding. Although science subjects (biology and geology) are especially suited to outdoor education, traditional classroom subjects such as math, music, and language arts can be taught. Sites can include gardens, farms, cemeteries, city parks and recreation areas, ponds, streams, forests, zoos, nature centers, fish hatcheries, and garbage dumps. Locations should have several types of topography or other unusual features, provide privacy, and have no hazards to students' safety. Administrative barriers to consider are class scheduling, transportation, and legal liability. Training in natural science, philosophy, and outdoor conservation can be provided for teachers through universities and existing outdoor education programs in 21 states. Eight sources of in-depth information on establishing an outdoor education program are listed. (NEC)

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OUTDOOR EDUCATION

FACT SHEET

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Developing An Outdoor Education Program
For Public Schools

by

James S. Euler

August, 1981

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OUTDOOR EDUCATION

FACT SHEET

DEVELOPING AN OUTDOOR EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

WHAT IS OUTDOOR EDUCATION?

Outdoor Education is education in the real world of the out-of-doors, where students are taken to a specific site and allowed to explore and observe its particular ecology. It is an extension of the classroom, rather than just a science or field trip, a first-hand study of nature and of the interdependence of all living things.[5] Briefly stated, it is education in, for, and about the outdoors. Outdoor Education is an effective way to develop students' knowledge and appreciation of their environment, to stimulate their curiosity, and to motivate them to learn.[7]

WHAT ARE THE FIRST STEPS IN SETTING UP A PROGRAM?

The first step is to bring teachers, administrators, and parents together to discuss establishing the program and obtaining the needed resources. Persuading parents is perhaps the key to the whole program, as they, in actuality, have the controlling say, since they decide whether or not their children will participate. Community involvement is the most important factor in establishing and maintaining a successful Outdoor Education program.[5]

The next step should be to work out a definite plan, with specific recommendations on site locations, topics of study, schedules for the school year, and estimated costs. This information is necessary to obtain funding from boards of education.[4]

WHAT TOPICS CAN BE TAUGHT?

Certain topics are especially suited to Outdoor Education. Biology and science--with the excellent opportunities for first-hand observations provided by an outdoor setting--are two. Geology is another, particularly in areas like the Southwest, where local topography is usually varied.[2]

Other, more traditional, classroom subjects may also be taught. Math can be incorporated into nature observations that require a tabulation and averaging of findings. Music can be taught, as students learn to make various instruments from natural materials they find in their explorations. Language arts is another possibility, as the outdoors provides inspiration for poetry and other creative writing.[7]

A wide range of special skills can be taught, from contour mapping to compass reading, all contributing to the development of the whole student-- mentally, physically and emotionally.[1]

WHAT IS A TYPICAL SCHEDULE LIKE?

Most one-day programs are scheduled around one specific topic. The day's activity might be charting local weather conditions, listing certain types of insects or animals, or examining various stages of tree growth, but there should be only one main focus for the day's program.[1]

The trip will usually begin from school in the morning. If the site is close enough, several hours will be available there for morning activities before a lunch break. After lunch, several more hours can be spent on learning activities before returning to school. Set up this way, the first half of the day might be devoted to exploration and observation, and the second half of the day to charting the findings.[1]

WHAT KINDS OF AREAS CAN BE USED FOR AN OUTDOOR EDUCATION SITE?

There are countless possibilities for Outdoor Education sites, such as gardens, farms, cemeteries, city parks and recreation areas, ponds, streams, forests, zoos, nature centers, fish hatcheries, and even garbage dumps. Such places provide students with an opportunity to explore the world around them.[7] Ideally, the site should be within a few hours' driving time. An appropriate site often exists within or near present school

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boundaries.[6] Depending on the type of site selected, the land may be purchased, if funds are available, or rented. In the case of state or federal land, it may be possible to use it at no cost, or for a small fee.[6] The site should have several types of topography or other unusual features, provide privacy and be away from densely populated areas, and have no hazards to the students' safety.[4]

WHAT SOURCES FOR FUNDING ARE THERE?

As part of the education curriculum, an Outdoor Education program, and any funding required, should be the responsibility of the local board of education. A careful, clear outlining of the benefits of the program and safety precautions that would be taken should be enough to convince the board. If they are unresponsive, several alternatives exist. Money is available from state Urban Education funds, federal ESEA Titles I & V, part C programs, and from private philanthropic and community service organizations.[4]

WHAT SORT OF ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS ARE THERE?

One of the possible obstacles to setting up an Outdoor Education program is the need to have flexible, modular scheduling of classes, so that all-day or half-day trips can be arranged with a minimum of disruption of regular classes. This requires a close cooperation between teachers and administrators, but can be simply resolved.[6]

Another concern is the problem of transportation to and from the outdoor site. Buses must be arranged for and consent forms sent home to parents to be signed. Again, administrators must be willing to stand behind the program to overcome this problem.[6]

Parents and administrators alike may be concerned about questions of legal liability for trips away from the school. An ERIC/CRESS publication on legal liability for adventure activities provides the information to answer these questions.[8]

WHAT KIND OF TRAINING IS NEEDED FOR OUTDOOR EDUCATION TEACHERS?

Most grade-level teachers need special training to work comfortably and confidently in the outdoors with students because the more casual and less restrictive outdoor setting requires a readjustment of the teacher's attitudes toward student behavior and discipline.[4] Internship opportunities for training in outdoor education are available through universities and existing outdoor education programs in 21 states; a directory of these is available from ERIC/CRESS.[3] Workshops and graduate programs concerned with Outdoor Education are currently offered at many universities around the country and more are springing up. Generally, these programs emphasize natural science, philosophy, and conservation, topics essential in Outdoor Education.[5]

WHAT OTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE?

The references cited contain more in-depth information on all phases of Outdoor Education, as well as additional references. These publications may be found at your nearest ERIC microfiche collection.

1 Aikman, John H., and David M. Brown. *Outdoor Education.* 1970. ERIC ED 045441

2 Albuquerque Public Schools, NM. *Albuquerque Public Schools Teacher's Guide to Outdoor Education.* 1968. ERIC ED 027983

3 Bachert, Russell E., Jr. *Directory of Outdoor Education Internship Opportunities.* 1981. ERIC ED 197889

4 Donaldson, George W., and Irwin Rosenstein. *Outdoor Education: A Guide for Planning Resident Programs.* 1977. ERIC ED 151123

5 Kirk, John J. *Outdoor Education -- Its Origin and Purpose.* 1968. ERIC ED 035493

6 Smith, Julian W. *Outdoor Education in Michigan Schools.* 1970. ERIC ED 041648

7 Staley, Frederick A. *Outdoor Education for the Whole Child.* 1979. ERIC ED 173000

8 Van der Smissen, Betty. *Legal Liability -- Adventure Activities.* 1980. ERIC ED 187500

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